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University Students' Attitudes Toward Homosexuals

*Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Eşcinsel Bireylere Yönelik Tutumları*Funda Bozkurt , Fidan Korkut-Owen 

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ABSTRACT

The current study examined the differences in the levels of homophobia in terms of the sex of participants, level of class, level of religiosity, acquaintance, and level of acquaintance with homosexual individuals among university students. Hudson and Ricketts's Homophobia Scale and a demographic questionnaire were given to 419 university students (298 female and 121 male) who participated in the study. The analyses were conducted using SPSS 22.0. The results showed that male students had more negative attitudes toward homosexuals compared to female students, students who defined themselves as religious had more negative attitudes, and individuals who had a homosexual acquaintance had more positive attitudes. Moreover, it was found that individuals who had a very close level of acquaintance with homosexuals had more positive attitudes toward lesbians and gays. No significant difference was found in the level of homophobia in terms of the level of class. The findings are discussed in light of previous research. In addition, suggestions for future research are provided.

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ÖZET

Bu çalışmada, üniversite öğrencilerinin eşcinsel bireylere yönelik tutumlarının cinsiyet, sınıf düzeyi, dini inanç düzeyi, eşcinsel bir tanıdığa sahip olup olmama ve tanıdık var ise tanışıklık düzeyi değişkenlerine göre farklılaşıp farklılaşmadığı incelenmiştir. Araştırmaya katılan 419 lisans öğrencisine (298 kadın ve 121 erkek) eşcinsellere yönelik tutumları ölçmeye yönelik olarak geliştirilen Hudson ve Ricketts Homofobi Ölçeği ile Kişisel Bilgi Formu verilmiştir. Veriler SPSS 22.0 istatistik paket programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Araştırmanın sonuçları, erkek öğrencilerinin kadın öğrencilerine, dini inanç seviyesi yüksek olan öğrencilerin dini inancı düşük olanlara göre eşcinsel bireylere yönelik daha olumsuz tutumlar beslediğini, eşcinsel bir tanıdığı olanların olmayanlara göre daha olumlu tutumlara sahip olduğunu ve tanışıklık düzeyi yaklaştıkça tutumların daha olumlu olduğunu göstermiştir. Eşcinsellere yönelik tutumların sınıf düzeyine göre anlamlı bir farklılık göstermediği de elde edilen bulgulardandır. Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgular önceki çalışmaların ışığında tartışılmıştır. Ayrıca gelecek araştırmalara ilişkin öneriler sunulmuştur.

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INTRODUCTION

In general terms, *sex* refers to the distinction of the genetic, biological, and physiological characteristics and differences that define individuals as male or female (Marshall, 1999). *Gender*, on the other hand, refers to the characteristics, behaviors, norms, and roles that any society considers appropriate for and expects from men and women. It differs according to time, geography, and culture; and thus, can be changed (World Health Organization, 2017).

Similar to the concepts of sex and gender, the concepts of sexual orientation, sexual identity, and sexual role are also different and distinct from each other. Within psychiatric classifications, *sexual orientation* refers to an individual's enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and sexual attraction to other people; *sexual identity* refers to an individual's perception of themselves in terms of sexual matters, including preferences and gender roles, and definition of their individual sexuality; and lastly, *sexual role* refers to sets of culturally defined attributes, such as actions, feelings, attitudes, personality traits, values, and interests that a society considers appropriate for males and females (Öztürk & Uluşahin, 2008). It is defined as heterosexuality when sexual orientation is directed toward the opposite sex, homosexuality when directed toward one's own sex, and bisexuality when directed toward both sexes (Psychiatric Association of Turkey and Sexual Education, Treatment and Research Association, CETAD). In fact, homosexuality is the most discussed among all sexual orientations.

Homosexuality, which dates far back in history, is defined as physical, emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction and the relationship between individuals of the same sex or gender (Güney, Kargı, & Çorbacı Oruç, 2004). Gay and lesbian are the terms used for male and female homosexuals, respectively. Although there is a certain amount of tolerance toward non-heterosexual sexual orientations in some societies, such as the Netherlands (Collier, Horn, Bos, & Sandfort, 2015), it seems that many cultures and religions hold a negative attitude against homosexuality (Güney et al., 2004; Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2001). Therefore, it is stated that prejudice and discrimination toward homosexuality are serious problems in today's societies (Polimeni, Hardie, & Buzwell, 2000). Despite the fact that homosexuality was removed by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) from the second edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) in 1973 (Drescher & North, 2015) and stated not to be a mental illness or sickness (Herek & Garnets, 2007), homosexual individuals are often exposed to stigmatization, labeled as 'sick' and 'abnormal', and forced to be heterosexual. Additionally, as a group targeted by prejudice and discrimination, homosexuals face various social and psychological problems as well. Some of these include situations such as being verbally and physically attacked and being unable to be open about their sexual orientation (Herek, 1989). Several studies conducted with homosexual university students (Ellis, 2009; Evans et al., 2017; Nelson, 2010; Tetreault, Fette, Meidlinger & Hope, 2013) have shown that these individuals were exposed to exclusion, humiliation, bullying, and physical and emotional violence by their peers. Similarly, the results of Danyeli Güzel's (2017) study showed that being exposed to social exclusion had a negative impact on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transsexual individuals, and several of them disguised their sexual orientation.

In a joint press statement made in 2010 by the Psychiatric Association of Turkey and Sexual Education, Treatment and Research Association (CETAD), it was indicated that homosexuality is an orientation the same way as bisexuality and heterosexuality, and not a disease. Moreover, it was stated that homosexuality is not a matter of preference; meaning that it is a phenomenon independent of the

free will of people (Psychiatric Association of Turkey News Bulletin, 2010). An important reason underlying the negative attitudes toward homosexuals is homophobia. When the concept of homophobia emerged in the 1970s, it was considered as a mental illness or a condition related to irrational fears toward homosexuality or homosexual individuals (Herdt & van der Meer, 2003). Similarly, Lorde (1978) defined homophobia as; *"The fear of feelings of love for members of one's own sex and therefore the hatred of those feelings in others."* (p. 31). However, the concept of homophobia now refers to a variety of broad and sometimes confusing topics that go far beyond the original definition and conceptualization. Homophobia, in the context of cultural ideology, alongside diplomacy and politics, institutional and social traditions, and discriminatory practices, refers to the diversity of emotions and intentions that cause violence and interpersonal behaviors (Herdt & van der Meer, 2003).

In general, homophobia is defined as negative feelings, attitudes, and behaviors toward homosexuality or homosexual individuals (Herek, 1988). By taking into consideration the prejudice and discrimination it brings along, homophobia is explained in the context of a specific cultural ideology (Herdt & van der Meer, 2003). According to Göregenli (2003), homophobia can be seen as an intergroup relation ideology that is accompanied by certain stereotypes and influenced by individual processes, such as personality, self-perception, and cognitive structures, formed as a result of the conceptualization of homosexual individuals as an outgroup. Moreover, it has been argued that the homophobic ideology does not develop by itself as an individual characteristic; instead, it is formed within a particular social-cultural context. Sakallı and Uğurlu (2001) argue that the reason behind the fear and negative feelings toward homosexuals is that individuals focus on the strict rules regarding sexual intercourse rather than thinking about romance and love and that they do not share the same values and opinions in areas such as friendship and world view. Additionally, it has been stated that another cause behind the formation of negative attitudes toward homosexuals is that people have too many traditional beliefs about gender roles (Herek, 1988). Similarly, according to Whitney (2001), the reason behind the disapproval of homosexuals' behavior is that it is contrary to traditional gender roles and beliefs and that it violates the norms of the heterosexist belief system. In other words, behaviors that do not comply with traditional norms are perceived by some people and societies as harmful, wrong, and forbidden.

Adherence to religion and gender norms are factors that lay the groundwork for the emergence of homophobia (Herek, 1988). In a study by Froyum (2007), it was found that Black teenagers viewed the male and female body as a 'match' and they considered homosexuality as 'nasty' or 'disgusting'. Furthermore, the participants perceived homosexuality to be less valuable compared to heterosexuality due to their beliefs regarding gender roles and religion. Similarly, according to Herek (1988), there is a significant correlation between religious affiliation and negative attitudes toward homosexuals. He states that heterosexual individuals who belong to a liberal religious denomination or who are not religious, and endorse nontraditional views of gender and family are more likely to have tolerant attitudes toward homosexuals.

It has also been suggested that there is a relationship between attitudes toward homosexuals and the stereotypical behaviors expected from men and women. In various societies, people perceive non-heterosexual orientations and identities as a threat to traditional male and female behavior. Since this perception is believed to undermine gender identities, it ostracizes homosexuals from society (Selek, 2001). In a study by Sakallı (2002a), it was found that college students defined male homosexuals with stereotypic attributes, such as "acts like women (acts femininely)", "wears make-up", "talks feminine",

“attention seeker”, and “emotional”. Similarly, in Deaux and Lewis’ (1984) study, it was found that men and women were considered homosexual when they were introduced with the characteristics of the opposite gender. Specifically, when men were introduced with feminine characteristics (e.g., source of emotional support, managing the house, and taking care of the children), and women were introduced with male characteristics (e.g., head of household, financial provider, and leader), they were considered homosexual. Apparently, the characteristics attributed to homosexuals include traditional roles that seem appropriate for men and women. Individuals who behave in ways that deviate from these traditional roles are also characterized as homosexuals and are subject to prejudice and discrimination (Herek, 1989; Whitney, 2001).

The established culture forms homophobic attitudes. Thus, culture marginalizes individuals with different sexual orientations. As a result, there is a greater probability that individuals with different sexual orientations might experience problems with mental health, self-esteem, and identity. Moreover, the risk of committing a suicide attempt and the rate of living on the street also increase (Göregenli, 2004). However, as might be expected, there are cross-cultural differences in attitudes toward individuals with different sexual orientations. For instance, Collier, Horn, Bos, and Sandfort (2015) found that the Dutch youths’ attitudes toward homosexuals were more favorable than those of the American youth. While the American adolescents who participated in the study stated that being homosexual is against social norms and religious beliefs, the Dutch participants believed that people are born as gay or lesbian and that these individuals should be allowed to love whoever they want. It has been indicated that the reason why the beliefs about homosexuality having a biological or genetic basis is more common among the Dutch youth might be due to the sexuality education given in middle school in the Netherlands (Ferguson, Vanwesenbeeck, & Knijn, 2008). However, considering that this education is not given in every country, it can be inferred that individuals might not develop enough insight or understanding regarding this issue. Therefore, it is common to see that attitudes toward homosexuals are predominantly negative in today’s world.

Studies show that negative attitudes and beliefs toward homosexuals emerge in many different areas of life, such as at home, in school, in peer groups, and in the whole society (Tasgenli, 2004; Herdt & van der Meer, 2003; Polimeni et al., 2000). For instance, homophobia within the family occurs in the form of verbal abuse, physical threat, or physical violence (Nocera, 2000, as cited in Göregenli, 2004). Besides, the educational system and the school itself, which play an essential role in the strengthening of the established discriminatory ideology, reinforce individuals’ perception of belonging to the majority, similarity as a virtue, and social approval. Several studies have shown that school life strengthens the ideology of masculinity and the widespread dogma of “compulsory heterosexuality” as well as homophobia (Göregenli, 2004; Phoenix, Frosh & Pattman, 2003). Consequently, it can be inferred that individuals exposed to this ideology might internalize homophobia. This situation, which has become part of their lives, might give an idea of why homophobia is so tough and resistant to change.

Under the circumstances, prejudices and negative attitudes toward non-heterosexual sexual orientations and homosexuals have been attractive research topics for researchers. So far, researchers have examined the relationships between attitudes toward homosexuals and different variables. One of these variables is gender. Several studies have found that men have more negative attitudes toward homosexuality compared to women (Herek, 1988; Kara, 2018; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Kurdek, 1988). Likewise, studies conducted in Turkey have shown that women generally have a lower level of

homophobia compared to men (Çırakoğlu, 2006; Güney et al., 2004; Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2001; Sanberk, Çelik, & Gök, 2016). Additionally, research findings have shown that men hold more negative attitudes towards male homosexuals (e.g., gays) (Anderssen, 2002; Herek, 1988; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). According to the researchers, men feel more pressure to conform to traditional gender norms than women. Consequently, they exhibit negative attitudes toward homosexual men who act against gender roles (Brown & Amoroso, 1975; Oliver & Hyde, 1995). Herek (1986) also stated that men's negative attitudes toward homosexuals are based on concerns regarding traditional male roles and characteristics. The basis of these worries is the fear of losing oneself and one's personality as a heterosexual man. In other words, in order to comply with social standards and cope with their anxieties, heterosexual men display homophobic attitudes which make them receive social support and lead to a decrease in their level of anxiety.

Another variable that has been found to have a relationship with attitudes toward homosexuals is the level of education (Sakallı Uğurlu, 2006). Studies have shown that there is a negative correlation between the level of education and level of homophobia. More clearly, higher levels of education lead to lower levels of negative attitudes toward homosexuals (Battle & Lemelle, 2002; Lewis, 2003). Thus, in this respect, it can be inferred that getting a university education might make a difference in attitudes toward homosexuals. This concern has been supported by the results of Lambert, Ventura, Hall, and Cluse-Tolar's (2006) study: In their research conducted with 364 university students, it was found that attitudes toward homosexuals were significantly more positive among juniors and seniors compared to freshmen and sophomores. According to these researchers, having a higher level of education seems to lead individuals to be more tolerant and open-minded.

Apart from these, Herek (1988) stated that adherence to strict and traditional gender rules have a negative influence on attitudes toward homosexuals. In addition, it has been found that the level of religiosity increases the level of homophobia (Wilkinson & Roys, 2005) and predicts attitudes toward homosexuals (Shulte & Battle, 2004). In a study by VanderStoep and Green (1988), it was found that individuals who stated that they were devoted to religion had more negative feelings toward homosexuals compared to individuals who were not. Similarly, in a study conducted in Turkey, students who had a higher level of religiosity were found to have higher levels of negative attitudes toward homosexuals compared to students who had a lower level of religiosity (Saraç, 2015). Research findings show that individuals who hold negative attitudes toward homosexuals consider gays and lesbians as individuals who violate God's rules and do not act in accordance with their gender (Herek, 1988; Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2006). As a result of such rigid thoughts, homosexual individuals and their behaviors get perceived as nonconforming to the norms of society, abnormal, and unacceptable. Since there are only a few studies that have examined the relationship between education and religiosity and attitudes toward homosexuals, the investigation of the relationship between these variables is suggested (Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2001; Saraç, 2015).

Two other variables that are believed to have a relationship with the level of homophobia are having a homosexual acquaintance and having social contact or interaction with homosexual individuals. According to studies conducted abroad as well as in Turkey, it has been found that individuals who have a homosexual acquaintance and who associates with homosexuals have more positive attitudes toward them (Anderssen, 2002; Çırakoğlu, 2006; Herek & Glunt, 1993; Kara, 2018; Sakallı, 2002a; Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2001). In an experimental study conducted with university students in Turkey, it was found that

after talking to a lesbian student for one hour, attitudes toward homosexuals changed in a positive way among students who, to begin with, had negative attitudes toward homosexuals (Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2002). Consequently, the researchers stated that getting to know a homosexual individual leads to a decrease in homophobic attitudes among students. However, in another study by Güney et al. (2004), it was indicated that having a homosexual acquaintance does not always lead to positive attitudes. According to these researchers, attitudes toward homosexuals change in a negative way as the level of acquaintance with homosexuals increases or gets closer. Specifically, it was found that attitudes were optimistic when the familiar homosexual was a friend. However, the attitudes were negative when the homosexual person was a member of the family.

As it is seen, homophobia is a serious problem abroad as well as in Turkey, and it has a negative impact on many homosexual individuals. It has been stated that homosexuals who are exposed to prejudice and negative attitudes get more attacked physically, have alcohol and substance use habits, and have more suicide attempts compared to heterosexual individuals (Faulkner & Cranston, 1998). In addition, several studies have found that homosexuals are unsafe on university campuses and prefer to hide their sexual orientation because their peers victimize them due to their orientation (Mustanski, Newcomb & Garofalo, 2011; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2013). Consequently, considering the findings mentioned above, it is clear that homosexual students experience social and psychological problems.

The university environment is expected to provide an equal and accepting environment for everyone. It is believed that determining the attitudes toward homosexuals among university students through counseling centers at universities can help with taking preventive steps and protective measures against possible acts of discrimination and violence. With its emphasis on the well-being and self-realization of the individual, the field of counseling is one of the disciplines with the highest potential to contribute to the lives of homosexual individuals. The findings of the present study are thought to be beneficial for counselors who work with homosexual individuals at universities; in that, they can become well informed and competent regarding the negative attitudes that homosexual individuals are exposed to. Additionally, it is believed that it might help individuals who have negative attitudes toward homosexuals to get to know and understand more closely the reasons behind their prejudices. Based on the literature described above, the present study aimed to examine whether or not university students' attitudes toward homosexuals would differ significantly according to their gender, level of class, level of religiosity, whether they have a homosexual acquaintance, and if they do, level of acquaintance.

METHOD

Study Group

The data of the study were obtained from a total of 419 undergraduate students (298 females (71.1%) and 121 males (28.9%)) studying at different universities in Turkey during the 2017-2018 fall semester. Participants were recruited through the snowball sampling method between December 1-15, 2017, by using the Google Docs program. In this sampling method, the process of sampling starts by reaching out to one of the individuals to be studied. After reaching this individual, other people suggested by the individual are reached, and then the same goes for other individuals suggested by these individuals. The process continues in this way by increasing the number of participants and ends with a sample by focusing on specific individuals (Şahin, 2014). Informed consent was obtained from all participants and

participation were voluntary. Fifty (11.9%) of the participants were freshmen, 87 (20.8%) were sophomores, 65 (15.5%) were juniors, and 217 (51.8%) were seniors. Regarding religiosity, 249 (59.4%) of the participants defined themselves as religious and 91 (21.7%) as non-religious. Also, 79 (18.9%) of the participants stated that they were unsure about religiosity. While 292 (69.7%) of the participants mentioned that they had a homosexual acquaintance, 127 (30.3%) of them stated that they did not. Regarding the level of acquaintance with homosexual individuals, 123 (29.4%) of the participants were very close (e.g., relative, friend, sibling, etc.), 126 (30.1%) were somewhat close (e.g., exchanging hellos, neighbor, etc.), and 48 (11.5%) were not close (e.g., neighbor's relative, etc.)

Ethical Statement

The authors declare that they have carried out the research within the framework of the Helsinki Declaration and with the participation of volunteer students.

Data Collection Tools

Hudson and Ricketts's (1986) Homophobia scale. In order to measure attitudes toward homosexuals, Hudson and Ricketts's (1980) homophobia scale was used. The Turkish adaptation of the scale was done by Sakallı and Uğurlu (2001). The scale consists of 24 items rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree, 6 = totally agree). During the adaptation study, data of 211 (105 males and 106 females) continuing their undergraduate education at Middle East Technical University (METU) were used. First of all, the scale was translated into Turkish by two students whose second language was English. Then it was translated back from Turkish into English by a teacher in the Department of Modern Languages at METU. Although Hudson and Ricketts's (1980) scale has 25 items, Sakallı and Uğurlu (2001) excluded one item about walking comfortably through a gay section of town from the scale because of the absence of a predominantly gay section in Ankara. A principal-components factor analysis of the items of the scale was performed with varimax rotation forced to 3 factors. The total variance explained by the three factors was 54.92%. The Cronbach's alpha value for the total score of Hudson and Ricketts's original scale was found to be .90, while it was found to be .94 in the Turkish version. The factors and their Cronbach's alpha values are as following: Factor 1, "Social interaction with homosexuals" ($\alpha = .90$); factor 2, "Probable family ties with homosexuals" ($\alpha = .88$), and factor 3, "Tendency to be a homosexual" ($\alpha = .66$). The total of the 24 items forms the measure of "Attitude toward homosexuality". In the present study, the total score was used. Eleven items in the scale are scored in reverse. Getting a high score on the scale indicates high levels of negative attitudes toward homosexuals; in other words, high scores demonstrate high levels of homophobia (Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2001). The Cronbach's alpha value in the present study was found to be .96.

Demographic Questionnaire. This questionnaire included questions regarding the participants' gender, level of class, how they defined themselves in terms of religiosity (e.g., "I define myself as religious", "I do not define myself as religious", "I am not sure"), whether or not they have a homosexual acquaintance, and if they do, the degree of that acquaintance (e.g., "Very close (my relative, friend, sibling, etc.)", "Somewhat close (exchanging hellos, my neighbor, etc.)", and "Not close (my neighbor's relative, etc.)")

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 22.0. First of all, in order to check for normality, skewness, and kurtosis values were examined.

The values obtained were found to be between $-/+ 1.5$ for all variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The homogeneity of the data was tested with Levene's test. Parametric statistics were used since the analyses showed that the data were normally distributed and that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated, except with regard to two of the variables (e.g., level of religiosity and level of acquaintance). Thus, to test against the unequal variances, the Welch and Brown-Forsythe tests were used. Independent samples t-tests were used in order to determine whether there was a statistically significant difference between students' attitudes toward homosexuals and 1) gender and 2) having a homosexual acquaintance. One-Way Variance Analysis (ANOVA) was used to examine whether the participants' attitudes toward homosexuals differed significantly according to their level of class, level of religiosity, and level of acquaintance with homosexuals. In case of significant differences, the one-way ANOVA was followed by post hoc testing with Fisher LSD. While testing the significance of the differences between mean scores, the significance level was taken as .05.

RESULTS

The findings are presented in the order of the independent variables: gender, level of class, level of religiosity, having a homosexual acquaintance, and level of acquaintance. An independent samples t-test was conducted in order to test whether there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores obtained from Hudson and Ricketts's homophobia scale among male and female students. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Independent samples t-test results for the homophobia scores based on gender

Gender	N	M	Sd	df	t	p
Female	298	64.51	28.39	184.81	4.64	.000*
Male	121	81.36	35.64			

* $p < .05$

As can be seen in the table, there was a significant difference in the mean scores obtained from the homophobia scale among males and females ($t=4.64$; $df=184.81$, $p<.001$). The results indicate that the scores of male students ($M=81.36$) were higher than the scores of female students ($M=64.51$). In other words, males had higher levels of negative attitudes toward homosexual individuals compared to females.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted in order to test whether there were any statistically significant differences between the means of university students' attitudes toward homosexuals among different levels of class. The findings are presented in Table 2. According to the results in Table 2, there was no significant difference in comparisons between mean scores of attitudes toward homosexuals among the level of class ($F(3, 415) = 2.24$, $p > .05$).

Table 2. One-way ANOVA results for the homophobia scores based on the level of class

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean Sum of Squares	F	p
Between Groups	6621.58	3	2207.194	2.24	.084
Within Groups	409707.32	415	987.25	2.24	.084
Total	416328.90	418			

A one-way ANOVA was conducted in order to examine whether there were any statistically significant differences between the means of university students' attitudes toward homosexuals among different levels of religiosity. Even though the data for this variable were normally distributed, Levene's test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated ($F=5.89$; $p<.005$). Therefore, Welch and Brown-Forsythe tests were used. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of Welch and Brown-Forsythe tests for the homophobia scores based on the level of religiosity

	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	p
Welch	26.33	2	180.39	.000
Brown-Forsythe	26.60	2	258.88	.000

a. Asymptotically F distributed.

As can be seen in Table 3, there was a significant difference between level of religiosity and negative attitudes towards homosexuals (Welch test; $F(2, 180.39)=26.33$, $p<.001$, Brown-Forsythe test; $F(2, 258.88)=26.60$, $p<.001$). Fisher LSD post hoc test was used in order to determine which groups caused the difference. The results revealed that there was a significant difference between participants who defined themselves as religious ($M=77.80$, $SD=30.94$) and participants who were unsure about religiosity ($M=57.17$, $SD=23.31$). A significant difference was also found between participants who defined themselves as religious ($M=77.80$, $SD=30.94$) and participants who did not define themselves as religious ($M=56.92$, $SD=32.13$). The level of homophobia was found to be higher among individuals who defined themselves as religious compared to individuals who were unsure about religiosity as well as individuals who did not define themselves as religious.

An independent samples t-test was conducted in order to test whether there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores obtained from Hudson and Ricketts's homophobia scale among individuals having and not having a homosexual acquaintance. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Independent samples t-test results for the homophobia scores based on acquaintance

Acquaintance	N	M	Sd	df	t	p
Yes	292	61.03	28.04	417	8.94	.000*
No	127	88.56	30.90			

* $p<.05$

As shown in the table above, there was a significant difference between students' homophobia scores based on whether or not they have a homosexual acquaintance ($t=8.94$; $SD=417$, $p<.001$). It was found that individuals who had a homosexual acquaintance had lower levels of homophobia ($M=61.03$, $SD=28.04$) compared to individuals who did not ($M=88.56$, $SD=30.90$).

A one-way ANOVA was conducted in order to test whether there were any statistically significant differences between the means of university students' attitudes toward homosexuals among different levels of acquaintance. Although the data for this variable were normally distributed, Levene's test showed that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated ($F=8.63$; $p<.001$). As a result, Welch and Brown-Forsythe tests were used. The findings are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Results of Welch and Brown-Forsythe tests for the homophobia scores based on the level of acquaintance

	Statistic ^a	df1	df2	p
Welch	33.79	2	109.82	.000
Brown-Forsythe	32.19	2	124.73	.000

a. Asymptotically F distributed.

As shown in Table 5, there was a significant difference between the level of acquaintance and the level of homophobia (Welch test; $F(2, 109.82)=33.79, p<.001$, Brown-Forsythe test; $F(2, 124.73)=32.19, p<.001$). Fisher LSD post hoc test was used in order to determine which groups caused the difference. The results showed that there was a significant difference between participants who stated their level of acquaintance as *very close* ($M=48.64, SD=20.45$) and participants who stated their level of acquaintance as *somewhat close* ($M=64.37, SD=26.81$); participants who stated their level of acquaintance as *very close* ($M=48.64, SD=20.45$) and participants who stated their level of acquaintance as *not close* ($M=85.84, SD=30.95$); participants who stated their level of acquaintance as *somewhat close* ($M=64.37, SD=26.81$) and participants who stated their level of acquaintance as *not close* ($M=85.84, SD=30.95$). The results revealed that level of homophobia was lower among individuals who had a very close level of acquaintance with a homosexual compared to individuals whose level of acquaintance was either somewhat close or not close. Moreover, individuals who had a somewhat close level of acquaintance had lower levels of homophobia compared to individuals who stated their level of acquaintance as not close.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS

The aim of the present study was to investigate whether or not university students' attitudes toward homosexuals would show a significant difference based on their gender, level of class, level of religiosity, whether they have a homosexual acquaintance, and if they do, level of that acquaintance. According to the findings, negative attitudes toward homosexuals differ significantly according to all the variables examined in the current study except for one (e.g., level of class).

When examining whether there was a significant difference between level of homophobia and gender, it was found that male students had higher levels of homophobia compared to female students. These results support previous research findings which show that men have more negative attitudes toward homosexuals than women (Anderssen, 2002; Herek, 1988; Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Kurdek, 1988; Lambert et al., 2006; Lim, 2002; McHugh Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1997; Steffens & Wagner, 2004). Similar results were also found in studies conducted with university students in Turkey: attitudes toward gays and lesbians have been found to be more negative among male students compared to female students (Çırakoğlu, 2006; Gelbal & Duyan, 2006; Sadıç & Beydağ, 2018; Sakallı, 2002a; Saraç, 2015; Soner & Altay, 2018; Şah, 2012).

According to Davies (2006), heterosexual men tend to exhibit more negative attitudes toward homosexual individuals than heterosexual women. One of the most common responses that explains this difference between men and women is that men feel more pressure regarding traditional beliefs. As a result, men are more prone to have more negative attitudes toward homosexual individuals compared to women. Furthermore, they tend to be more courageous in terms of being open about their attitudes (Kite & Whitley, 1996; Oliver & Hyde, 1995). In other words, men perceive the existence of homosexuals as a threat and contrary to normative masculine/feminine roles (Herek, 1988; Selek, 2001). Therefore, they

develop more negative attitudes toward homosexuals. When the reasons for these negative attitudes and behaviors observed in men are examined, it is seen that researchers have different explanations. For instance, according to Black and Stevenson (1984), the fact that the word “homosexual” only brings to mind “gays” might cause men to have more negative attitudes than women. Additionally, rigidity in gender roles, masculinity, and fear of femininity have also been stated as factors related to homophobia (Lock & Kleis, 1995). Especially men who try to adhere to masculine stereotypes and attach importance to their gender roles perceive behaviors that do not comply with this (e.g., violating gender roles, exhibiting the behaviors of the opposite sex, etc.) as a more serious problem and threat because they do not want to be defined as a “Betty”, “light boy”, or “homosexual” (Dunbar, Brown & Amoroso, 1973; Morin & Garfinkle, 1978; Whitley & Kite, 1995).

Considering Turkey, it can be said that it is a country dominated by patriarchy in which the majority places emphasis on and acts according to traditional gender roles (Çırakoğlu, 2006). As a matter of fact, this normalizes heterosexual relationships and demonstrates homosexual relationships as wrong and immoral. Thus, it can be thought that university students might start to exhibit and internalize negative attitudes toward homosexuals in this way. In addition, the fact that the word homosexual reminds of gays rather than lesbians (Herek, 2000; Sakallı, 2002a) and that the behaviors of gay individuals are perceived as “womanly”, provides an idea of why levels of homophobia are higher in males compared to females in the present study.

According to the results of the current study, no significant difference was found between different levels of class and attitudes toward homosexuals. Prior research findings suggest that a higher level of education leads to a positive change in attitudes and values; in other words, the higher the level of education, the more open-minded individuals become (Lambert et al., 2006). It is believed that education can influence prejudice and discriminatory behaviors toward different social groups in society. Homosexual individuals are one of these groups. The findings of several studies suggest that there is a negative correlation between education and homophobia (Beran, Claybaker, Dillon, & Haverkamp, 1992; Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Lambert et al., 2006; Lewis, 2003; Price & Hsu, 1992; Sakallı Uğurlu, 2006). Thus, these results are inconsistent with the results of the present study. However, there are also other studies that show no significant relationship between the two variables (Ben-Ari, 1998; Estrada & Weiss, 1999). Likewise, considering the results of the current study, there was no significant difference between attitudes toward homosexuals based on level of class. Due to the inconsistency of the study results in this regard, the level of class variable might be considered as a variable that is worth studying in more detail. Considering the results of the present study, it can be argued that the function of the university education should be questioned. Since level of homophobia did not decrease as level of class increased, it might be inferred that, besides providing individuals a career, the university education might be insufficient in terms of providing a different and more positive point of view for students.

In the findings of the current study, it was found that attitudes toward gays and lesbians were more negative among individuals who defined themselves as religious compared to individuals who were unsure about religion and individuals who did not describe themselves as religious. This result is consistent with the results of various other studies (Herek, 1988; Herek & Capitanio, 1995; Schulte & Battle, 2004; Siraj, 2009; Tuna, 2019; VanderStoep & Green, 1988; Wilkinson & Roys, 2005). In Herek and Capitanio's (1995) study, it was found that attitudes toward homosexuals were more negative among individuals who participated in religious activities frequently compared to individuals who participated in

religious activities a little or not at all. Similar results were also found in Schulte and Battle's (2004) study: Christians who defined themselves as highly religious had more negative attitudes toward homosexuals compared to less religious individuals. Additionally, in a study by Siraj (2009), it was found that individuals who defined themselves as Muslims held negative attitudes toward homosexuals. This was explained by the result of being religiously conservative in their attitudes toward homosexuality and gender roles.

There is a limited number of studies that have examined the relationship between religious belief and homophobia in Turkey. One of these studies was conducted by Gelbal and Duyan (2006). In their research, it was found that university students who defined themselves as highly religious had negative attitudes toward homosexuals. Correspondingly, Saraç (2015) found that freshmen students who had higher levels of religiosity had more negative attitudes toward lesbian and gay individuals. In addition, in Borlu's (2018) study, too, it was found that higher levels of religiosity were related to higher levels of negative attitudes toward homosexuals.

In Turkey, it is estimated that 98% of the population is Muslim (Bolaka Boratav, 2006). In the religion of Islam and the *Shari'ah* (Islamic Law), homosexuality is defined as a crime (Siraj, 2009). Although Turkey is not an Islamic state, it can be supposed that individuals who internalize the religion of Islam might be influenced by these rules and act accordingly. As stated earlier, the characteristics of homosexuals are perceived as more feminine, weak, feeble, and worthless compared to masculine characteristics and roles (Duyan & Duyan, 2005; Sakallı, 2002a, 2002b). As a result, individuals who adhere to traditional gender roles and religious rules disapprove the behaviors of homosexuals as well as consider them as people who disobey God's rules (Herek, 1988; Sakallı-Uğurlu, 2006). Perhaps, the reason behind the negative attitudes toward homosexuals among the participants who defined themselves as religious in the present study might be related to the issues mentioned above.

According to the findings of this study, the level of homophobia among individuals who had a homosexual acquaintance was lower than individuals who did not have a homosexual acquaintance. In other words, students who had a homosexual acquaintance had more positive attitudes toward lesbian and gay people. These findings are consistent with the results of prior studies (Anderssen, 2002; Çırakoğlu, 2006; Sakallı, 2002a). For instance, in Anderssen's (2002) 2-year follow-up study, a greater frequency of contact or better acquaintance with lesbian women and gay men were found to be related to more favorable attitudes toward them. Similarly, in a study conducted in Turkey, a positive change in attitudes toward homosexuality was observed among students after a one-hour interaction with a lesbian person (Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2002). Considering the results of the present and prior studies, it might be supposed that the change in attitudes toward homosexuals from negative to positive when individuals are or become acquainted with homosexuals is that they recognize the similarities between heterosexuals and homosexuals. In other words, individuals might acknowledge that there is no significant difference between the two groups, apart from their sexual preferences. Additionally, it can be inferred that interacting and making contact with a homosexual individual might lead individuals to call into question the correctness of their prejudices and beliefs about homosexuals and homosexuality. As a result, this might cause the positive change in their attitudes.

Finally, the results of the current study revealed that attitudes toward homosexuals changed in a positive direction as level of acquaintance got closer. Level of homophobia among individuals whose level of acquaintance was very close (e.g., relative, friend, sibling, etc.) was significantly lower than the

level of homophobia among participants whose level of acquaintance was somewhat close (e.g., exchanging hellos, neighbor, etc.) and not close (e.g., neighbor's relative, etc.). Also, attitudes toward homosexuals among individuals whose level of acquaintance was somewhat close were significantly more positive compared to individuals who did not have a close level of acquaintance. These results are consistent with prior research findings (Anderssen, 2002; Çırakoğlu, 2006; Güney et al., 2004; Sakallı, 2002a; Sakallı & Uğurlu, 2001; Şah, 2012). Furthermore, researchers have stated that socially interacting and increasing the level of acquaintance with homosexuals lead to an increase in positive attitudes toward them (Anderssen, 2002; Herek & Glunt, 1993). From this perspective, it can be inferred that having a homosexual acquaintance and socially interacting with a homosexual individual have an important and positive impact on beliefs as well as attitudes toward lesbians and gays.

The findings of the present study were consistent with the findings in the literature. University students' attitudes toward homosexual individuals differed significantly according to the variables of gender, level of religiosity, having a homosexual acquaintance, and level of acquaintance. There was no significant difference in terms of level of class. Specifically, the attitudes toward lesbians and gays were more negative among male students compared to female students; individuals who defined themselves as religious had more negative attitudes compared to individuals who were not religious and unsure about religiosity; participants who had a homosexual acquaintance held more positive attitudes compared to those who did not; and finally, the attitudes were more favorable among individuals whose level of acquaintance was close (e.g., relative, friend, sibling, etc.) compared to the individuals who had more distant acquaintances with homosexuals.

It is believed that the results of the current study might contribute to the field of counseling and guidance. Determining young people's attitudes toward homosexuality and informing them about it is of great importance. In the literature, it is recommended that professionals working in the fields of psychology, counseling, and guidance should organize activities that will enable students to question and gain awareness regarding their negative attitudes and beliefs. In addition, contacting and collaborating with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBT) associations (e.g., LISTAG, Pembe Hayat, SPoD, Lambda Istanbul, etc.) and organizing seminars that address these issues at the university might be valuable. Such activities might be beneficial for young individuals in terms of raising their awareness and providing an opportunity to question and reduce their negative attitudes and beliefs.

In order to determine attitudes toward homosexuals more comprehensively, future studies, both quantitative and qualitative, may examine this topic with different sample groups. Also, to learn more about sexual biases, future studies might investigate attitudes toward homosexuals separately for lesbian and gay individuals. Variables that might have an influence on individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward homosexuals can also be explored. For instance, variables such as the frequency of social interaction and the nature and duration of the interaction might provide valuable information. Furthermore, in order to increase the level of tolerance and open-mindedness toward biased groups, researchers might – rather than focusing solely on social interaction – also pay attention to other factors that have an impact on level of homophobia (e.g., gender roles, social norms, and culture).

Although the present study provides important findings, some limitations should be considered. First of all, the study included only undergraduate students studying at different universities in Turkey during the 2017–2018 academic year. Master's and doctoral students were excluded from the study. Thus, the results can only be generalized to groups with similar characteristics to the research sample. Second

of all, since participants were not asked about their sexual orientation, it was assumed that all of them were heterosexual. Third of all, the fact that level of religiosity was assessed with a single question including three options, might be considered as a limitation. Lastly, the scale used in the current study was a self-reported measure. Self-reported measures have some disadvantages, such as the possibility of social desirability bias and response bias. Thus, these limitations need to be considered when interpreting the results.

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Author Contributions

The present study was conducted by both authors working together and cooperatively. Both of them contributed equally in every step of the study.

Conflict of Interest

It has been reported by the authors that there is no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Statement

In the writing process of the work titled "**University Students' Attitudes Toward Homosexuals**", the scientific, ethical and citation rules were followed, there was no falsification on the data collected, the "Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Journal Editorial Board" had no responsibility for all ethical violations, and all the responsibility belongs to the authors. I undertake that it has not been sent to another academic publishing medium for evaluation.